

**ASSEMBLY BILL**

**No. 1209**

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**Introduced by Assembly Member Cook**  
**(Coauthors: Assembly Members Fletcher, Jeffries, Logue, Nielsen,**  
**Silva, and Wagner)**  
**(Coauthors: Senators Berryhill, Correa, Lieu, and Rubio)**

February 18, 2011

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An act to add Section 972.3 to the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1209, as introduced, Cook. County veterans service officers.

Existing law allows the board of supervisors of each county to appoint a county veterans service officer, whose duty is to administer the aid for veterans, as specified.

This bill would appropriate the sum of \$11,000,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs for disbursement to the counties to fund the activities of the county veterans service officers.

Vote:  $\frac{2}{3}$ . Appropriation: yes. Fiscal committee: yes.  
State-mandated local program: no.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
- 2 following:
- 3 (a) The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are creating
- 4 an entirely new generation of veterans who may be eligible for
- 5 federal benefits because of their war service and their physical and

1 mental condition. Californians make up to 10 percent of the  
2 military forces being used in these conflicts.

3 (b) The California National Guard, as well as reserve forces in  
4 California, are providing significant force levels to these wars.

5 (c) Most of these returning California veterans are not aware of  
6 the federal and state benefits that are available to them.

7 (d) Additionally, it is estimated that in California there may be  
8 over two million veterans and their widows or widowers, who are  
9 unaware that they may be eligible for pensions from the federal  
10 government based upon their past military service in World War  
11 II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, or the current conflicts in the  
12 Middle East.

13 (e) In 1997, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed  
14 Senate Bill 608, enacted as Chapter 318 of the Statutes of 1997,  
15 that amended Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.  
16 Chapter 318 requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to  
17 annually determine the amount of new or increased monetary  
18 benefits paid to eligible veterans by the federal government that  
19 were attributable to the assistance of county veterans service  
20 officers and requires the Department of Finance to consider an  
21 increase in the annual budget for county veterans service officers,  
22 in an amount not to exceed five million dollars (\$5,000,000), if  
23 justified.

24 (f) In 1997, through the efforts of county veterans service  
25 officers, new or increased federal veterans' benefits had risen to  
26 eighty-eight million dollars (\$88,000,000). From 1997 until 2006,  
27 these new and increased federal veterans' benefits had risen to  
28 over one hundred seventy-seven million dollars (\$177,000,000)  
29 as a result of the State of California providing annual subvention  
30 funding to county veterans service officers of up to two million  
31 three hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$2,350,000).

32 (g) From 2007 until 2010, the annual subvention was increased  
33 to two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000), and by  
34 2010, the annual federal benefits attributable to county veterans  
35 service officers had risen to three hundred five million dollars  
36 (\$305,000,000).

37 (h) In 2009, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed  
38 Senate Bill 419, enacted as Chapter 183 of the Statutes of 2009  
39 that amended Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.  
40 Chapter 318 found and declared that 50 percent of the amount

1 annually budgeted for county veterans service officers is  
2 approximately eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000). The  
3 Legislature further found and declared that it is an efficient and  
4 reasonable use of state funds to increase the annual budget for  
5 county veterans service officers in an amount not to exceed eleven  
6 million dollars (\$11,000,000) if it is justified by the monetary  
7 benefits to the state's veterans attributable to the effort of these  
8 officers.

9 (i) County veterans service officers provide valuable services  
10 to California's veterans and to the state and its counties by assisting  
11 veterans in obtaining federal and state benefits to which the  
12 veterans are entitled.

13 (j) County veterans service officers also contribute to increased  
14 revenues and significant cost avoidance for the state and its  
15 counties far in excess of the amount of state general funding  
16 provided to them.

17 (k) Since 1995, at a cost to the state of thirty-three million  
18 dollars (\$33,000,000) from the General Fund, the county veterans  
19 service officers have obtained two billion nine hundred  
20 seventy-eight million dollars (\$2,978,000,000) in federal veterans  
21 benefits for California veterans and their dependents, thereby  
22 garnering the state an 88-fold increase on its investment.

23 (l) In 2010, the Governor implemented, and the Legislature  
24 approved, Operation Welcome Home, a statewide campaign to  
25 connect with every returning veteran to determine his or her needs  
26 and connect the returning veterans with the services to assist in  
27 the successful transition from the battlefield to the homefront.

28 (m) Each year, since the current conflicts began, 30,000 military  
29 men and women are discharged from military service in California  
30 and it is beneficial and cost effective to the state to provide these  
31 new veterans assistance in navigating the myriad of federal, state,  
32 local, nonprofit, and private sector service provider benefits and  
33 services for which they are eligible.

34 (n) The goal of Operation Welcome Home is to reduce veterans'  
35 homelessness, decrease veterans' unemployment rates, increase  
36 participation in federal veterans programs, such as federal  
37 unemployment benefits, compensation, and pension programs,  
38 increase the number of veterans in California colleges and  
39 universities, increase early detection of mental illness, such as

1 post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and divert  
2 veterans from the criminal justice system.

3 (o) The goals of Operation Welcome Home necessitate an  
4 increased utilization of the county veterans service officers, who  
5 are the interface between the state and counties with the veteran's  
6 community.

7 (p) As a result, the Governor's budget proposed to increase local  
8 assistance to Operation Welcome Home and the county veterans  
9 service officers from two million six hundred thousand dollars  
10 (\$2,600,000) to eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000), the full  
11 amount allowed by Senate Bill 419.

12 (q) The Legislature approved an increase in local assistance  
13 from two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000) to  
14 seven million six hundred thousand dollars (\$7,600,000) in  
15 recognition of the fact that county veterans service officers not  
16 only fulfilled the moral obligation of assisting our veterans but  
17 also that in the last 15 years, the county veterans service officers  
18 have brought three billion dollars (\$3,000,000,000) in new,  
19 unencumbered federal moneys into the state for a modest  
20 expenditure by the state of thirty-four million dollars (\$34,000,000)  
21 in local assistance.

22 SEC. 2. Section 972.3 is added to the Military and Veterans  
23 Code, to read:

24 972.3. Notwithstanding any other law, eleven million dollars  
25 (\$11,000,000) is hereby appropriated from the General Fund to  
26 the Department of Veterans Affairs for disbursement to the counties  
27 in accordance with the existing procedures established under  
28 Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.